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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement is a key element of efforts of the Austin Independent School District (AISD) to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council or some other group with parent representation, and schools receiving funds under federal "titles" are required to include parent representation on advisory councils. In the 2000-2001 academic year, 55 AISD campuses used a combination of funds to employ a parent support specialist to provide workshops and other services to parents and community members. This report provides data on several components of AISD's parent involvement program. As part of the evaluation, surveys were completed by 371 administrators, teachers, parent support specialists, other professionals, and classified staff. A survey in English and Spanish was also completed by 4,496 parents. Additional information came from a detailed survey completed by 31 parent support specialists. Data from other evaluation studies added to the picture of parental involvement in the AISD. A review of the data indicates that the AISD is in compliance with Texas Education Agency Standards for parent involvement. Some areas of weakness were identified, including a lack of awareness on the part of teachers of the district's parent involvement policies, operations, and funding sources and a lack of awareness on the part of parent support specialists of certain school district policies. In addition, parents were often unaware of programs and opportunities for involvement. (SLD)

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# PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**Austin Independent School District**

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## Foreword

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, or some other group with parent representation. In addition, schools receiving *title* funds are required by state and federal law to include parental representation on campus and district advisory councils. Several programs, including Title I, Title I Migrant, and the local district program address these efforts. The common goal of these programs is to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities. In 2000-01, 55 AISD campuses used a combination of funds to employ a parent support specialist who provides workshops and other services to parents and community members in order to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children.

Although this report provides data on several components of AISD's parent involvement program, it is not to be considered an all inclusive report. There are many other programs in AISD that involve parents and support staff in their operations, and such programs are geared to more specific activities such as prevention of dropout, gangs, teen pregnancies, and drugs.

Because district staff (especially teachers) are the "door-keepers" to communication with parents about their child or children, it is important to provide them with constructive feedback. The goal of this evaluation is to provide results that will help administrators, principals, teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff to involve parents in richer relationships with their schools.

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**Acknowledgement**

A number of people worked with the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) in developing and carrying out the evaluation. OPE wishes to thank AISD's parent support specialists, the AISD Parent Programs Specialist, and Family Resource Center's parent support specialist and secretary; Partners in Education staff, AISD PTA/PTO presidents; Title I designated private schools; and members of the Parent Involvement Advisory Council which included the Citywide PTA president; staff from ESC Region XIII; the Fathering Organization; Parents Anonymous; Education Austin; a representative from Southwest Educational Development Lab (SEDL); Andrews' elementary school principal; Sanchez elementary and Dobie middle schools' parent support specialists; and the AISD School Support Services' director.

During the school year, staff from many campuses worked with staff from the Parent Programs office, a part of AISD's Department of School Support Services, to enhance their parent involvement activities. The office is housed in the Family Resource Center located at Allan Elementary School and is directed by AISD's Parent Program Specialist. The office staff provide training for parent support specialists, coordinate parent involvement activities districtwide, facilitate Title I and Title I Migrant Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, set up special staff development workshops/sessions (e.g., TEA District Effectiveness Compliance visit preparation, and Creating Family Friendly Schools) publish or make available parenting periodicals, provide on-site adult literacy classes, and perform Spanish translations as needed for parent events. The Center is also the meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council, a sub-group of the district's task force that updated AISD parent involvement policy.

An example of community involvement in AISD is the Partners in Education Program, a partnership between AISD and the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce that encourages business and community involvement in public schools. Partners are matched with the school of their choice and provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and cash donations.

To enhance all of the district's parent and community involvement efforts, AISD's School Board adopted an updated parental involvement policy that was recommended for adoption by the District Parent Involvement Task Force in August 2000. The updated policy is based on Joyce Epstein's 1997 list of important parent involvement activities: communication, parent training, promoting student learning, community resources, decision-making and volunteering. (See www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm for some of Epstein's work.) Epstein's research indicates these six activities have been successful ways to involve parents. These activities are endorsed by the National PTA.

**Evaluation Overview**

During school year 2000-2001, staff from AISD's Office of Program Evaluation worked with the following on parent involvement evaluation: AISD School Support Services, AISD parent support specialists, AISD's Family Resource Center, AISD's grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, AISD's PTA/PTO presidents, AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council, 14 private schools; and parents residing in the AISD attendance area. The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assemble some information from district staff and parents as to the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools.

Since parent and community involvement is such a large and complex phenomenon, this evaluation focused on five specific objectives.

**Evaluation Objectives**

1. To measure campus staff awareness of AISD's recently revised parent involvement policy, and AISD's adherence to federal, state, and local requirements.
2. To document parent support specialists' activities and use of other *entitlement funds* in parental involvement activities.
3. To measure self-reported level and quality of parents' involvement in schools within AISD attendance zones based on results of a districtwide parent survey.
4. To document AISD's community involvement through the Partners in Education program.
5. To provide decision makers with information and recommendations for program modification and to guide 2001-2002 evaluation goals.

## EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

**Measuring Campus Staff Awareness**

An AISD employee survey was administered in January 2001. The survey is a coordinated effort among AISD's divisions and departments to gather information from employees districtwide that is pertinent to their department or division. The coordinated survey audience for questions about parent involvement issues included a sampling of campus administrators, teachers, parent support specialists, other professionals and classified staff.

Of the 575 surveys sent to the campuses, 459 (80%) were returned and 371 (81%) were valid or usable for analyses in the following areas: staff awareness of district parent policy and resources, parental inclusion in activities at the respondent's campus, and professional development for parent support staff. In Tables 1-3, responses that are 10 % or less are not reported because they represent a maximum number of 9 responses at most. Use the following legend to review the employee responses to the survey: *Legend: A=administrators, C=classified, O=other professionals, and T=teachers.*

Table 1 shows many teachers (41%) were not aware of the recent adoption of a revised parental involvement policy by the AISD School Board and superintendent, or that multiple funding sources were available to campuses for parent involvement training (42%). In addition, most teachers (59%) were not familiar with the newsletter. In general, administrators, classified and other professionals were more aware of these issues as demonstrated by their responses. These findings for teaching staff raise a concern since teachers are often the first contact in the communication line between school and home.

Table 1: AISD 2001 Employee Survey Awareness of AISD Parent Policy and Resources

| | Yes | No | Not Sure |
|---|---|---|---|
| • I am aware of the Austin ISD School Board and Superintendent's recent involvement policy and regulation as requested by the Texas Education Code. | 60% A<br>46% C<br>48% O | 41% T | 13% A<br>28% C<br>23% O<br>32% T |
| • I am aware of multiple funding sources (Title I, II, IV, local grants, etc.) available to campuses for parent involvement training or other instructional activities. | 73% A<br>40% C<br>60% O | 42% T | 33% C<br>19% O<br>19% T |
| • I am familiar with AISD's "Just for Parents" newsletter. | 76% A<br>42% C<br>51% O | 14% A<br>39% C<br>40% O<br>59% T | 19% C<br>15% O |

**Parental Inclusion**

In Table 2, the majority of respondents expressed general agreement with all of the items indicating that they were aware of parents being actively involved at their campuses. There were no negative ("disagree") responses. The percentages of neutral responses are high enough in some cases to warrant concern about the meaning of those responses, even though there was not a "Don't Know" option. These statements will be addressed again in the next survey with an inclusion of a Don't Know option.

Table 2: AISD 2001 Employee Survey-Awareness of Parental Inclusion on Campus

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Parents and community members are included as planners and decision makers in planning at my campus. | 48% A<br>44% O | 38% O<br>44% T | 15% C<br>15% T |
| • My school's parent involvement program allows parents meaningful opportunities to participate in their child's education. | 34% A<br>45% C | 49% A<br>34% C<br>42% T | |
| • My school sponsors programs that recognize and use diverse parent and community population resources (retired teachers, military persons, local and state politicians, neighborhood media producers, actors, authors, artists, employers, local clergy, etc.) | 34% A | 39% C<br>44% O<br>35% T | 20% A<br>15% C<br>22% T |
| • My school uses other members of AISD school support staff (counselors, school support community specialists, visiting teachers, etc.) in parent involvement activities. | 92% A<br>71% C<br>72% O<br>70% T | | 24% C<br>20% O<br>23% T |

**Parental Training and Resources**

When asked about staff training and training resources, the majority of all respondents agreed that training for parent involvement was important to their schools (see Table 3). However, their responses to the Family Resource Centers' provision of staff development programs for persons providing parent involvement training were mostly neutral. Again, the neutral response is hard to interpret since the respondents may have a lack of familiarity with the Family Resource Center and there was no "Don't Know" option.

Table 3: AISD 2001 Employee Survey–Training and Training Resources

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Training for parent involvement is important to my school. | 42% A<br>62% C<br>73% O | 40% A<br>31% C<br>20% O<br>40% T | 15% C<br>15% T |
| • Austin ISD's Family Resource Center provides an excellent staff development program for persons providing parent involvement training. | | 22% A<br>36% C<br>17% O<br>15% T | 57% A<br>37% C<br>71% O<br>75% T |
| • Parent support specialists or persons responsible for parent involvement training at my campus should take advantage of AISD's Family Resource Center's free staff development. | 33% A<br>44% C<br>30% O<br>24% T | 43% A<br>38% C<br>40% O<br>29% T | 22% A<br>18% C<br>30% O<br>46% T |

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**Coordinated Staff Survey Recommendations**

The coordinated survey data suggest several areas in which school staff shows *a lack of knowledge*. The following *operational* recommendations are offered for increasing campus staff's knowledge of and access to AISD's parent involvement operations, policies, and other resources, because teachers and other student support staff are first contacts for the majority of parents. Their knowledge or perception of AISD operations, goals and mission should not be limited to classroom activities only. They should be full partners in involving parents in the education of students; their scope of knowledge must include general information about district operations, policies, resources or contacts for resources. Therefore:

- *Campuses must provide ongoing staff development for teachers and other staff that will increase their awareness of AISD parent involvement operations, policies and other district activities, and their access to the Family Resource Center's training sessions.*
- *The Family Resource Center must market itself and its services within AISD more aggressively.*

**AUSTIN ISD ATTENDANCE AREA PARENT SURVEY 2000-2001**

An Austin ISD Attendance Area Parent Survey 2000-2001 was developed and administered to more than 4,000 parents in the AISD attendance zone in spring 2001, including AISD private schools within the AISD attendance zone that received federal *title funds* during 2000-01.

The survey, written in English and Spanish, was based on four (school-parent communication, parent knowledge of school resources, promoting student learning, and community resources) of the six types of parent involvement activities endorsed by AISD's parent involvement policy. In addition, parents were asked if they had additional needs or concerns. The survey was designed to meet mandatory evaluation requirements; gather individualized campus data for and about the public schools; provide benchmark information for the participating private schools within the AISD attendance area that receive Title I funds; include PTA/PTO presidents in the survey process; and acquire information about campus staff most often used by principals to process, administer and collect survey data, and the sites of most survey administrations.

The survey packet was sent to 102 AISD public campuses (Pre-K-12) and 14 private school campuses (PreK-8). Instructions were for school staff to survey at least 40 parents, complete the return checklist, and forward all surveys to AISD's Family Resource Center or call for pick up by the Family Resource Center's parent support specialist. Individual campus results were summarized and reported to campus principals. District-level results are presented in this report.

**Results-Public Schools**

Of 4,675 total surveys received, 4,496 (96%) were valid for analyses. The majority of surveys were completed on the site of distribution. Surveys were deemed usable if they contained at least three responses. One hundred twenty-one of the valid surveys were from the private schools. Private school data were analyzed separately. Public school analyses showed 73% or 3,169 parents completed the English version of the survey; and mothers (62%) completed the surveys more often than the fathers (9%) or both parents (15%). Grades one (13%), three (10%) and two (9%) had the highest percentage of parents completing the survey.

Summary responses to the survey statements are presented in Tables 4-6 by categories. In Table 4A, the majority of parents felt that their school communicated with them in the language that they used in their households (93%) and about school affairs and support services that were available for students and families (71%).

Table 4A: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Communication

| Communication | Strongly Agree/Agree | Strongly Disagree or Disagree | Don't Know | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The school communicates in the language(s) that I use in this household. | 93% | 3% | 1% | 3% |
| My school communicates with me about support services that are available for students and families (referrals, immigrant or migrant education, ESL classes, mentoring, career counseling, and scholarship assistance). | 71% | 11% | 16% | 3% |

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In Table 4B, most parents (76%) said they checked with their child on a daily basis to see if the school had sent home materials needing their attention.

Table 4B: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Communication

| Communication | Daily | Weekly | Monthly | Two/more times per year | Never or Once per year | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I check with my child to see if the school has sent home materials needing my attention. | 76% | 16% | 3% | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| I check with the school to determine if I have missed any current communication (test dates, registrations, special events). | 15% | 28% | 20% | 26% | 1% | 10% |

In Table 4C, parents responding expressed the highest preferences for weekly folder review (66%) and parent conferences (64%) as the best forms of communications from the school to their homes.

Table 4C: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Communication

| The best forms of communication for this household are: (Check all that apply.) | |
|---|---|
| Weekly folder review (66%) | E-mail (16%) |
| Parent conference (64%) | Homework hotline (8%) |
| Progress Report (49%) | Other (6%) |
| Telephone Calls (44%) | Home visits (5%) |

Most parents (80%) agreed that their schools offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues (see Table 5). Also, most felt the schools encouraged families to help their children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, use the homework hotline or folder (89%), and to take advantage of academic after-school or summer programs and/or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement (77%).

Table 5: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Interaction and Promotion of Student Learning

| Interaction (Campus-to-Parent) | Strongly Agree/Agree | Strongly Disagree or Disagree | Don't Know | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My school staff offers parents the opportunity to discuss parenting, child development, and or other family issues. | 80% | 6% | 12% | 2% |
| The school encourages my family to help children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, and use the homework hotline or folder. | 89% | 5% | 4% | 2% |
| The school encourages families to take advantage of academic after-school or summer programs and/or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement. | 77% | 9% | 13% | 2% |

Table 6 shows 70% of the parents agreed that their schools offered training or informational workshops that were inclusive of both parents. In addition, 67% of the parents agreed that their schools did an excellent job of coordinating community resource services.

Table 6: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Support Services

| Support Services | Strongly Agree/Agree | Strongly Disagree or Disagree | Don't Know | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The school offers a variety of training or informational workshops that are inclusive of both parents (parenting, child development, TAAS, TEKS, grade level transition, choice sheets, graduation plans, etc.) | 70% | 9% | 17% | 4% |
| My school does an excellent job of coordinating community resource services (free immunization, mental and health contacts, family disaster relief, adult education, etc.) | 67% | 10% | 22% | 3% |

**Survey Administration**

Seventy-six percent of 116 schools returned staff assignment confirmations and checklists with their parent surveys. Review of the confirmation sheets shows parent support specialists (49%) and PTA/PTO presidents (20%) were assigned the task of administering the survey most often (see Table 7).



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Table 7: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001
Assignment Confirmation Sheet

| Person Assigned | Number | Percent Assigned Tasks |
|---|---|---|
| Parent support specialists | 43 | 49 |
| PTA/PTO presidents | 17 | 20 |
| Counselors and principals (5 each) | 10 | 11 |
| Assistant principals, campus secretaries, private school directors (3 each) | 9 | 10 |
| Attendance Clerk, principal's secretary, teachers (2 each) | 6 | 7 |
| Computer lab specialist, curriculum specialist, and School/community liaison (1 each) | 3 | 3 |

The checklist from schools also provided details on the number of surveys given out for completion and the numbers returned, as well as the various methods and sites of administration. For example, the highest number of surveys returned by a high school was 58, a middle school was 107, an elementary school was 238, and a private school was 48. In fact, several elementary schools returned more than two hundred surveys, and most elementary schools received 75% of the surveys that had been sent to parents. Secondary schools were not as successful. Some staff from secondary schools stated that they had fewer opportunities to access large groups of parents in their secondary setting. In some cases, they also cited the lack of specific staff (e.g., parent support specialists) as a deterrent to better and more frequent parental involvement opportunities. A common response from many schools (both elementary and secondary) was that they needed a longer period (or earlier time in the year) to administer the survey.

A variety of methods and sites were used in survey administration as shown in Table 8. The most popular sites reported were adult classes or general meetings (e.g., PTA/PTO, workshops, assemblies).

Table 8: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001
Methods and Sites of Survey Administration

| Methods and Sites | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Multiple administration in ESL or other adult classes | 33 |
| PTA/PTO Meeting | 30 |
| Workshops (TAAS, Family nights, etc.). (11 each) | 22 |
| Administered at special assemblies & training sessions. (9 each) | 18 |
| Coffee Talk with principal and classroom sampling. (7 each) | 14 |
| GEAR UP, Volunteer, CAC, and Advisory meetings (3 each) | 12 |
| Handouts, bulk mail, parent requests, and Choice Sheet Night, parent conference, student drop off and pick up. (2 each) | 12 |
| Academic Showcase, after-school program, student breakfast or lunch, carnival, home visit, neighborhood walk, Parent Academy, planning meeting, summer youth orientation meeting, and a tutoring class. (1 each) | 11 |
| Sent surveys home | 9 |

**Parent Involvement Needs**

The last statement of the survey asked parents if there were other parental involvement areas or needs they would like for their school to address. All of those specific comments are not recorded in this published report. Rather, this campus-specific information was provided to each school that participated in the survey through an individual school profile. An individual school profile summarized the data collected from the surveys including the parents' comments applicable to the participating school.

Although most comments made by parents were specific to their school, several themes recurred districtwide. For instance, twenty-five parents specifically mentioned the desire for adult literacy classes; twenty-five parents requested better communication during parent-teacher conferences, meetings, seminars, and other activities with the school staff (principals, teachers, counselors), and preferably in the language spoken in their homes; eleven requested after-school tutorial or ESL classes for their children; and nine wanted paperwork requiring their attention sent out in a more timely fashion.

**Results for Private Schools**

Six private schools returned 121 surveys that were usable for analyses, and all but one were completed in English (the other in Spanish). Of surveys completed, 67% were completed by mothers, 15% both parents, and 7% fathers; 11% did not indicate who completed the survey. Prekindergarten (32%) and fifth grade (11%) had the highest number of parents completing the survey. Survey results for the private schools mirror the public schools' results. For instance, almost all parents responding (97%) agreed that the school communicated with them in the language that they used in their households. Seventy percent of parents indicated that they checked with their child on a daily basis to see if the school had sent home materials needing their attention. Parents expressed their highest preferences for weekly folder review (77%), progress reports (74%), and parent conference (67%) as the best forms of communication from the school to their homes. Most parents (85%) agreed that the school offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues. Also, most (94%) felt the schools encouraged families to help their children with homework, set academic goals, and use the homework hotline. The majority of parents agreed with the following: the school communicated to them about available support services (44%); offered a variety of training or informational workshops that were inclusive of both parents (55%); encouraged families to take

advantage of academic after-school or summer programs (58%); and did an excellent job of coordinating community services (51%). However, the number of "don't know" responses for each statement was high enough to cause concern about the degree to which all parents were aware of each of these services/programs. For instance, 38 (31%) parents responded "don't know" to the statement, "My school does an excellent job of coordinating community resource services such as free immunization, mental and physical health agency contacts, etc." Although, children of these parents attend private schools, these parents are just as eligible to access these services as are parents of children enrolled in public schools.

**Parent Survey Recommendations**

Several *operational* recommendations are proposed for using the parent survey results:

- *Staff from District and community offices, agencies, councils, or departments (e.g., the Office of Program Evaluation, Parent Involvement Advisory Council, School Support Services, and the Family Resource Center) should use the data in districtwide format to effect change in the timing of survey administration; make greater efforts to communicate with PTA/PTO presidents about parent involvement activities on their campuses; and develop strategies to address the areas of concern shown in the survey responses (e.g., lack of parent awareness of certain school/district services).*
- *Both public and private school staff should use their school profiles to address parental concerns, comments and administrative improvements.*
- *District staff working with entitlement programs should take advantage of the "mirror effect" of the survey results by coordinating efforts to work with parents of students enrolled in public and private schools in the same content, context, and time frame.*

The following reasons justify the recommendations: 1) PTA/PTO presidents serve on a volunteer basis and can not spend as much time conducting parental involvement activities or attending staff development as do paid school support staff; 2) The survey results can help both public and private schools prepare better academic and campus operations; 3) The private schools that participated in the development and administration of the survey have been recipients of Title I funds for a number of years. These funds are generated from those students enrolled in their school who are from designated Title I attendance zones, and many often return

to the public school system once they have completed grade 6; 4) AISD and the private schools receive support services from the Family Resource Center's parent support specialist; and 5) The good faith efforts of volunteers, non-volunteer school staff/persons, and parents must be rewarded by partnership inclusion.

## PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support specialists are AISD staff persons who provide workshops, seminars, fairs, and other services to parents and community members that can enhance, encourage, and empower them to participate in the education of children. In order to document the variety of services provided by the parent support specialists to campuses, evaluation data are gathered through an annual questionnaire sent to those staff. Attendance records for staff development and meeting minutes also were used to supplement the questionnaire results.

A questionnaire was designed and sent to parent support specialists at 55 AISD schools in spring 2001. Questionnaires were returned by 31 (56%) of the parent support specialists. Nine of the 55 schools (Allan, Barrington, Linder, Burnet, Fulmore, Martin, Mendez, Pearce, and Lanier) employed two or more parent support specialists each during 2000-2001. Two of these schools (Linder and Fulmore) returned two questionnaires each. Ten of the schools had new staff and only three of the new staff members returned completed surveys. The questionnaire was designed to get information from parent support specialists in the following areas: awareness of local districtwide surveys; methods used to gather parental input; participation in AISD resource programs and staff development; contributions to community empowerment and parental training; other unusual/unique work-related requests received from school staff; and need for services from AISD Office of Program Evaluation. The summary responses to the questionnaire are presented below by categories.

**Awareness**

Sixteen (52%) parent support specialists were not sure about whether they had completed the District's 2001 Coordinated Employee Survey. Eleven (35%) said they completed the survey. When asked about a community telephone parent survey administered last year by the University of Texas, 16 (52%) respondents said they were not familiar with this.

**Gathering Input from Parents**

The parent support specialists used a combination of methods to gather parental input and feedback on activities they conducted during 2000-2001. Think tank activities or open discussions (n=21) led the list in methods used most often by the parent support specialists. Annual parent surveys and telephone calls (n=20) were also mentioned.

**Staff Development Activities**

The parent support specialists were asked to list staff development activities that they had completed in the past year that were offered by AISD or other agencies. Following are the staff development activities mentioned most often: Connections Resource Center Celebration of Families (n=25); Creating Family Friendly Schools (n=25); Texas Education Agency's Parent Involvement Conference (Creating Opportunities for Student Success) (n=10); Education Service Center Region XIII workshops (n=6); and AISD Impact Training (n=5). Attendance records were kept on monthly staff development sponsored by Family Resource Center. Out of 9 staff development sessions, 37 or 65% of 57 parent support specialists attended three or more of these.

**Adult Literacy**

To help or empower parents in self-improvement, Title I grant guidelines suggest working cooperatively with other programs in the district, including adult literacy. Based on survey results, 24 of the 31 (77%) parent support specialists held adult literacy classes during the 2000-2001 school year. They enrolled 1,103 adults between August 2000 and May 2001. Three hundred and twenty-six (30%) of the enrolled adults completed the classes, and 77 (7%) entered the workforce for the first time.

**School Level Parental Involvement**

Title I funds are allocated for school-level parental involvement activities, including family literacy training and instruction to enhance parenting skills. During 2000-01, thirty-one parent support specialists primarily spent their time preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies; attending meetings/staff development; providing information to parents; recruiting volunteers (parent, community members or business); and making home visits or calling parents. As reported by parent support specialists, Table 9 shows a summary of parental and community participation in various activities offered by the schools. As results indicate, school assemblies drew the highest number of parents.

Table 9: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire-Parental Involvement Activities Summary 2000-01

| Parent Activity | Parent Attendance | # Schools Responding |
|---|---|---|
| Assemblies | 4,281 | 19 |
| Regular Workshops (Make-It Take It, Sticker Book, Family Nights, etc.) | 2,725 | 17 |
| Social (Gangs, Drugs, Teen Pregnancies, etc.) | 1,845 | 12 |
| Wellness (Stress, Mammography, Inoculations, dental, etc.) | 965 | 10 |
| Parent & Student Transportation | 770 | 8 |
| Home or Community Visits | 1,004 | 4 |
| Parent Volunteers (CAC reps., chaperons, monitors, and TA's | 768 | 6 |
| Special get-togethers (parent with school staff) | 565 | 3 |
| Speciality Classes, Fairs, Workshops | 1,010 | 7 |
| Recipients of Charitable Acts | 262 | 3 |

**Unique Work-Related Requests From Campus Staff**

Several AISD staff members from School Support Services, Human Resources, the Family Resource Center, and the Office of Program Evaluation, as well as two representatives from Education Austin, worked through the Parent Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC) to unify the job titles and descriptions of the parent support specialists; establish a uniform starting pay grade; and secure a salary increase for those presently employed. This was done due to a concern within School Support Services about the variation in assigned job activities among parent support specialists across the district. The Office of Program Evaluation assisted the PIAC by gathering unique work-related information through the parent support specialist questionnaire. These data were instrumental in creating a singular job title for parent support specialists, a specific job description, and a pay increase that went into effect August 2001.

Parent support specialists described the following unusual or unique work-related requests given them by school staff during the 2000-2001 school year:

- Substituted for various staff or community members (n=5);
- Provided transportation for: 1) a mentor to purchase flowers for a child's baby cousin's grave and the trip to the grave yard; 2) parent, siblings and a child with internal bleeding to the hospital; and 3) eight students, twice per week, to and from the University of Texas Reading Lab for one-to-one tutoring in reading n=3);
- Appointed to be campus recycling coordinator (n=2);

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- Picked up donations, food, and other supplies that are not always slated for parental involvement activities (n=2);
- Provided health care for child with severed finger; and child with a broken elbow; and assisted with full-scale funeral arrangements for a family member (n=1); and
- Provided "clean-up" service to pre-kindergarten students in the bathroom.

**Recommendations For Parent Support Specialists**

The parent support specialist's questionnaire and other support documents indicate parent support specialists in AISD met their goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. However, other evidence indicates that the goals could have been met more richly. For instance, several problems were apparent: the return rate for the parent support specialist questionnaire (56% or 31 of 55 parent support specialists) was low; and there was limited participation by parent staff in staff development meetings as documented by attendance records. It is important to note that increasing survey participation will provide complete data on parent support for state reporting. Also, increasing participation in staff development will benefit all parent support specialists through shared knowledge of effective parent involvement strategies. Therefore, the following *operational* recommendation is offered for consideration:

- *Program staff and district administrators must seek out and work with each school that did not participate in the questionnaire and had little or no attendance at staff development meetings offered by the Family Resource Center.*

## AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

AISD has access to many local business and community volunteers and resources through Austin Partners in Education (APIE), formerly the Austin Adopt-a-School program. Both monetary donations and volunteer hours are given to support Austin schools through APIE. Table 10 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past two years. Increases occurred from 1999-2000 to 2000-01 in in-kind contributions, cash donations, number of volunteers, and number of volunteer hours to AISD schools. See Partners in Education's web site for additional information (www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/community/partners/index.phtml)

Table 10: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin ISD Partners in Education, 1999-2000 and 2000-01

| Type of Donation | 1999-2000 | 2000-01 |
|---|---|---|
| In-Kind Contributions | $2,892,343 | $4,295,736 |
| Cash Donations | $3,115,851 | $4,279,080 |
| Number of Volunteers | 12,303 | 16,649 |
| Number of Volunteer Hours | 358,620 | 366,251 |

*Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 1999-2000, 2000-01*

## SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

According to a study (Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools) by Westat and the Policy Studies Associates (2001), reading and mathematics achievement improved faster for students in grades 3-5 when two factors were present: professional staff development for teachers in those subject areas, and active (teacher and other) school staff outreach to parents of low achieving students (see website www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html). Therefore, encouraging parent involvement is a critical component in promoting student learning.

Parent support specialists, PTA/PTO presidents, teachers and other school staff are primary initiators of parental contact. Regardless of the length or site of the contact, parental contact is critical to achieving AISD's vision of providing every student with an excellent education. In addition, parental contact is aligned with AISD's belief that family and community are vital partners in the development of students. Engaging parents for input and decision making at the campus or district level is in alignment with the District's parental involvement policy and regulation.

A recent TEA District Effective and Compliance (DEC) visit seems to indicate that AISD is effective in promoting parent involvement. DEC staff reviewed much of the data in this report to substantiate their findings that AISD was in compliance on parental involvement efforts according to TEA standards. All data were made available at the campus level in order to provide information to campus staff for improvement of their efforts to engage parents.

The Office of Program Evaluation used a variety of methods to gather the data for this report. The data revealed areas of strengths and weaknesses. Those areas of weakness that are of the most concern include:

- teachers' lack of awareness of AISD's parent involvement policies, operations, funding sources, and etc.;
- parent support specialists' lack of awareness of certain AISD activities such as the district-sponsored workshops or employee surveys;
- low parent support specialists' participation in district activities such as staff development, PAC meetings and surveys; and
- some parents' lack of knowledge about certain school issues and resources (e.g., coordination of community resource services 22%, schools offering of a variety of training or informational workshops that are inclusive of both parents 17%, and communicating to parents about other support services that are available for students and families 16%).

As mentioned in earlier parts of this report, teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff, are the "gate keepers" of communication between school and parents. They often are the first contact opportunity with the school, they provide the first impression, and they often must interpret policy. Thus, they are the key to more successful involvement of parents in schools.

The level of unawareness or uncertainty among some school staff about parent policy, and the lack of parent support specialists' participation in district activities indicate that many staff need training in strategies for involving parent successfully. Therefore, the following *operational* recommendation is offered for consideration:

- *Administrators must empower teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff to carry out these roles by including them as active shareholders in AISD's parent involvement program. They must be held accountable to that inclusion.*

# Austin Independent School District

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